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Police use force to evict Irish Travellers from illegal portion of Dale Farm

Basildon, England, UK, 20.10.2011 08:13, (ROME)



Dale Farm, UK

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Yesterday police used force to evict a settlement of Travellers at Dale Farm near London after a court definitively refused the residents' appeal not to destroy the largest illegal campsite in the country. Helmeted police used shields, tasers and truncheons against the residents of Dale Farm, who defended themselves by throwing stones.

Several dozen police officers broke through the gate of the camp in the early morning hours while court-appointed workers started using jackhammers on the wall around it. The police procedure prompted an angry reaction from the residents, one of whom set his own caravan on fire in protest.

After the police ordered the area cleared, the Travellers and their supporters started throwing stones and other objects at them. Officers used their tasers on two of them. Some residents chained themselves to their dwellings.

Yesterday was the culmination of a dispute that has dragged on for 10 years. Part of Dale Farm, which is near Basildon, about 40 km east of London, is located on a former scrapyard which was purchased 10 years ago by several Traveller families from Ireland. Other Traveller families then began buying land adjacent to the scrapyard and parked their caravans and mobile homes on it.

Some of the land belonging to the Travellers is zoned as green belt and cannot be built on. The British media also reports that some locals claim to feel threatened by the Travellers. Property values are said to have declined due to the Travellers' presence, as has the level of the local school.

A total of 240 people in 86 families live on 2.4 hectares in the illegal part of the camp. Some have decamped to the adjacent legal camp.

Irish Travellers' lifestyle is similar to that of Romani people, even though there is no ethnic connection between them. The Basildon town hall emphasizes that it is merely upholding the law by performing the eviction. The Travellers claim their human rights are being violated and that they are being targeted as a vulnerable group whose lifestyle doesn't correspond to that of the majority.

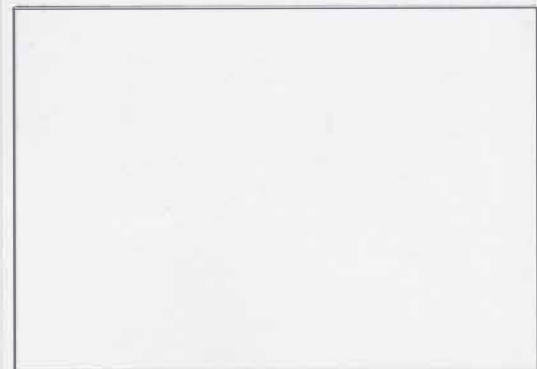
"The memory of Dale Farm will dog Britain for generations. They are dragging us away from the only home we have," camp resident Kathleen McCarthy said in a statement.

Speaking during a television interview, Tony Ball, a representative of the Tory-led town hall, reiterated that the eviction is about upholding the law first and foremost and condemned the violence that occurred. "The scenes of premeditated violence during which protesters threw bricks and stones, threatened police with iron bars and set caravans on fire are shocking," Ball said.

The famous movie actress Vanessa Redgrave visited the Travellers at Dale Farm to show her support for them at the start of September. The Travellers are also supported by Anglican and Catholic bishops and Jewish Rabbis. Rabbi Janet Burden criticized the offensive language that has been used against them, stressing that it was "reminiscent of anti-Semitic rhetoric." The Guardian daily also reports that Jan Jařab, the European representative of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, offered his assistance to the British Government in negotiating a settlement, to no avail.



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